August 13, 2021

Via email

Dear Director Bown-Crawford, Deputy Director Kiburi, Chair Chavez, Vice Chair Gallegos and Allocations Committee Co-Chair Harris,

Thank you for your work to support the arts and culture field as we continue to navigate the devastating financial impact of COVID to our industry. We know we all share a common goal to see organizations and arts workers return to work safely with the resources they need to build back more sustainable and equitable operations.

We understand the Council had to make some difficult decisions in their last round of grant funding for the 2020-21 grant season as a record number of applications were received with limited dollars to allocate. In a historic year of tremendous upheaval and crisis for our sector, it is concerning that only 22% of grant applications were funded with several counties and longtime grantees receiving zero funding. You can imagine the destabilization this has caused for organizations that count on public funding from the CAC annually. We are certain you are hearing from the field as well, asking for clarity on how this happened and what can be done to get funding out as quickly as possible.

The arts and culture field worked hard to advocate for increased and historic investment in the arts, culture and live events industries in the 2021-22 California state budget that passed in July with an unprecedented $140 million to the CAC. Close to 5,000 letters were sent to legislators and the Governor in support of this investment with hundreds of people meeting with their representatives to explain how critical this funding is to the survival of nonprofit arts and culture organizations across the state. We are certain the Administration and Legislature would want the funds into the hands of organizations in need immediately. We urge you to act to distribute funds as quickly as possible.

Our board held a special meeting Monday, August 9 to address these field wide concerns and respectfully offer the following recommendations:

- Immediately allocate up to $6 million dollars from the local assistance general budget 2021-22 funds of $26 million to fund more applications already written and adjudicated for 2020-21 grants programs. We ask that the staff make a recommendation to Council on the best use of this allocation as soon as possible. Historically, grants applications that received a 4+ rating received some funding. The 2020-21 funding average applicant scored a 5.3+. 
In this scenario, local assistance funding would be close to $20 million for both 2020-21 and 2021-22 grant cycles. This is separate from the $100 million appropriated to the council for CA Creative Corps Pilot Program and Creative Youth Development.

This gets money out into the field expeditiously. To create new grant guidelines, submit new applications, convene review panels and council approvals, even with two funding cycles, the reality is most grantees would not see any new funds for at least six months. Many of your grantees will not be able to wait that long for funding and we will see the continued reduction in programs and closures, as well as continued furloughs and unemployment.

- Release a memo explaining why there was only approximately $13.5 million in funding available in 2020-21 when local assistance general budget funds approved by the Legislature were nearly $26 million.

Although the council made this decision three years ago, there is a lot of confusion in the field about how we ended up with 50% less in funding this year. As a government agency, transparency is critical to your mission and clear communications help to avoid misunderstandings and the spread of misinformation. We urge you to explain this as clearly as possible to avoid any further confusion.

We hope you accept these recommendations, understanding our intent to work collaboratively and respectfully with the Council to address the immediate and dire needs of the arts and culture nonprofit sector.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,

Julie Baker
Executive Director, Californians for the Arts
915 L Street, C-422
Sacramento, CA 95814

Ron P. Muriera
Board President